

THE CONNECTICUT FOUNDATION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT, INC.
STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF S.B. 104

The Connecticut Foundation for Open Government – or CFOG, as it is known – is a tax-exempt, not-for-profit, nonpartisan, educational foundation founded in 1991. Its members are drawn from the media, academe, law, business and government. It is dedicated to promoting the open and accountable government essential in a democratic society. It seeks to achieve this by educating policymakers and citizens on the need for the free flow of information on all public policy matters.

CFOG is filing this statement in support of Senate Bill 104.

In 1964, Bob Dylan wrote a song called “The Times They Are a-Changing.” Well, they still are “a-Changing” – perhaps faster than ever before.

Today 71% of 18-29 year olds and 63% of people aged 30-49 cite the Internet as their main source of news. Adults are increasingly turning to mobile devices for their news. Social media also plays an important role as a source of news. Therefore, you are spending money on CT-N, but not necessarily getting what you want, since fewer of your constituents see you because they are watching less and less conventional TV.

CFOG believes that a new generation of CT-N needs to be created to manage and anticipate technological innovations transforming the way citizens receive, access and interact with information about the public policy issues facing Connecticut.

S.B. 104 sets the stage for such a new network. It would authorize the creation of a new State Civic Network. The network would be multi-platform, available to citizens wherever they are, on whatever platform they use. It would provide coverage of all three branches of government. It would add context to what is happening, making information easily accessible and useful. It would incorporate programming, education and outreach focused on building civic skills. It would accomplish all this with the establishment of an independent, non-profit, non-partisan management entity, similar in structure to community access television, and overseen by the Public Utility Regulatory Authority. It would be funded by a monthly subscriber fee, similar to how C-SPAN and community access stations are currently funded. Thus, the new entity would be monitored and accountable to the public, but independent from government itself.

CT-N has been an essential partner to CFOG by covering a number of its public policy programs over the years. However, it lacks the capacity to cover most important civil society programs, as well as the proceedings of the executive and judicial branches. In fact, as currently constituted, it cannot even cover all of the committee meetings and hearings of the General Assembly. So something has to be done. S.B. 104 begins the process of necessary change, and interestingly, it would do so by returning several million dollars to the state budget.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.